

House and in this country, and understands how important these outpatient clinics are and the incredible honor and why it's right to name this clinic for a true Minnesota hero.

Mr. PETERSON. I thank the gentleman, thank him and the gentleman from Arkansas for letting me have a couple of minutes.

I think you have already covered all or most of my speech, but we are very honored to be able to name the outpatient clinic in Alexandria after a true American hero, Mr. Max Beilke, who grew up on a small farm near Alexandria, Minnesota.

He was a 1950 graduate of Alexandria High School. He was drafted into the Army and sent to Korea in 1952. Shortly after he returned home from his tour of service in Korea, he reenlisted and made the Army his full-time career.

Max served in Korea, Germany and, lastly, Vietnam, where he, during his 8-month tour, served as operations sergeant at Camp Alpha in Saigon, where all soldiers were processed going to and coming from the United States. As was noted, he was the last combat soldier to leave Vietnam while his family watched on television.

After 21 years in the Army, Max retired in 1974 as a master sergeant. Eventually, he settled in Laurel, Maryland, where he lived with his wife, Lisa, and raised two daughters. After retiring from the Army, he earned a master's degree from Central Michigan University.

As was noted, Max was very instrumental in establishing the TRICARE system for our veterans, and it was because of that he was at the Pentagon on September 11 and met his untimely death on that day. He was laid to rest on December 11 in Arlington National Cemetery.

He had a distinguished career in the Army and as a civilian. He has the support of all Minnesotans and all our veterans organizations. He very much deserves to have this clinic named after him.

I want to commend the VA for opening this clinic. I think this is the fifth clinic that they have opened in my district. It was proposed in 2004, and we had the grand opening ceremony just last month. For too long rural veterans in my district have had to travel too far for health care, but this clinic will bring veterans' health care services closer to all the veterans who live in that area. The VA estimates that it will serve 3,500 local veterans with primary care and mental health care and will provide a variety of other services as well.

I urge the House to pass this legislation.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, again I would like to thank Mr. PETERSON, the gentleman from Minnesota, for bringing this forward. We very strongly support this bill. It's great that we honor a true American hero, not only for his service connection and how he served in the military, but how he led his life.

Again, we urge all of our colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 3157.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Minnesota?

There was no objection.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I, too, urge my colleagues to unanimously support H.R. 3157. I thank the gentleman from Minnesota for highlighting this, telling one of those stories of heroism, one of those stories of selfless service and then tying it to something that's incredibly important as we move forward—rural care for our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3157.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL VETERANS CEMETERY IN SOUTHERN COLORADO REGION

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 174) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in the southern Colorado region.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 174

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL CEMETERY IN SOUTHERN COLORADO REGION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish, in accordance with chapter 24 of title 38, United States Code, a national cemetery in El Paso County, Colorado, to serve the needs of veterans and their families in the southern Colorado region.

(b) CONSULTATION IN SELECTION OF SITE.—Before selecting the site for the national cemetery established under subsection (a), the Secretary shall consult with—

(1) appropriate officials of the State of Colorado and local officials in the southern Colorado region; and

(2) appropriate officials of the United States, including the Administrator of General Services, with respect to land belonging

to the United States in El Paso County, Colorado, that would be suitable to establish the national cemetery under subsection (a).

(c) AUTHORITY TO ACCEPT DONATION OF PARCEL OF LAND.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may accept on behalf of the United States the gift of an appropriate parcel of real property. The Secretary shall have administrative jurisdiction over such parcel of real property, and shall use such parcel to establish the national cemetery under subsection (a).

(2) INCOME TAX TREATMENT OF GIFT.—For purposes of Federal income, estate, and gift taxes, the real property accepted under paragraph (1) shall be considered as a gift to the United States.

(d) REPORT.—As soon as practicable after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the establishment of the national cemetery under subsection (a). The report shall set forth a schedule for such establishment and an estimate of the costs associated with such establishment.

(e) RELATIONSHIP TO CONSTRUCTION AND FIVE YEAR CAPITAL PLAN.—The requirement to establish a national cemetery under subsection (a) shall be added to the current list of priority projects, but should not take priority over existing projects listed on the National Cemetery Administration's construction and five-year capital plan for fiscal year 2008.

(f) SOUTHERN COLORADO REGION DEFINED.—In this Act, the term "southern Colorado region" means the geographic region consisting of the following Colorado counties:

- (1) El Paso.
- (2) Pueblo.
- (3) Teller.
- (4) Fremont.
- (5) Las Animas.
- (6) Huerfano.
- (7) Custer.
- (8) Costilla.
- (9) Alamosa.
- (10) Saguache.
- (11) Conejos.
- (12) Mineral.
- (13) Archuleta.
- (14) Hinsdale.
- (15) Gunnison.
- (16) Pitkin.
- (17) La Plata.
- (18) Montezuma.
- (19) San Juan.
- (20) Ouray.
- (21) San Miguel.
- (22) Dolores.
- (23) Montrose.
- (24) Delta.
- (25) Mesa.
- (26) Crowley.
- (27) Kiowa.
- (28) Bent.
- (29) Baca.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ) and the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, while I am pleased to be here today to bring H.R. 174, I think it's probably too light to say sponsored by our former colleague on the committee, Mr. SALAZAR, to the floor today. This bill will establish a national veterans cemetery in El Paso County, Colorado.

Just for background note, Mr. SALAZAR, who has moved on to another committee, has been a tireless advocate of our veterans, and this was a piece of legislation that I watched him advocate for with great passion because of the need. Southern Colorado, including El Paso County and the city of Colorado Springs, has the second highest concentration of veterans living in the entire United States.

Currently, those veterans in southern Colorado and their families who wish to either visit a veterans cemetery or have their loved ones interred must travel into the Denver metropolitan area to Fort Logan National Cemetery in often treacherous weather conditions. Not only is this an undue burden, but the Fort Logan National Cemetery is quickly running out of spaces.

To alleviate this problem, H.R. 174 directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in El Paso County, Colorado.

H.R. 174 reflects a fitting tribute to those Americans who have served our Nation with honor. The veterans' national cemeteries of the United States demonstrate the desire of a grateful Nation to appropriately commemorate those who served in our Armed Forces.

Since 1862, more than 3 million burials have occurred in VA national cemeteries. The National Cemetery Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs manages 130 national cemeteries nationwide for our veterans. Of the 130 cemeteries, 60 of them are no longer accepting in-ground interments, which results in millions of veterans and survivors being unserved and turned away from our national cemeteries.

While the State Cemetery Grants Program has met with success, the need to build new national cemeteries with a strategic vision is really still quite urgent. This is why Mr. SALAZAR introduced this bill and a related bill, the National Cemeteries Expansion Act of 2009, H.R. 3544, which would require the VA to reexamine its entire national cemetery establishment policy standard of 170,000 veterans in a 75-mile radius. This policy clearly has outlived its usefulness and should be revised immediately.

I want to thank Chairman FILNER and Ranking Member BUYER for pushing this bill forward. As we lose more of our Greatest Generation of veterans and face the unfortunate prospect of additional fatalities, we need to make certain that veterans are provided a dignified, accessible, and well-maintained final resting place. H.R. 174 helps to ensure that this happens for the many veterans and survivors of the region of southern Colorado.

Also, I would like to add that in the past this bill enjoyed the support of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, and the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Finally, I again want to applaud the leadership of Mr. SALAZAR on this bill,

the bipartisan manner of the VA Committee understanding how important this is. Mr. LAMBORN, from Colorado Springs, has been intricate in making this happen.

I can tell you this is one of the most moving and passionate discussions we have in the VA. The commitment to making sure national cemeteries are accessible to our veterans is a key priority.

I urge the passage of H.R. 174.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 174, which would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to construct a new national cemetery in southern Colorado. Providing our veterans with a place of honor and repose is one of the most sacred missions of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and we have given this mission our unstinting support over the years.

The National Cemetery Administration's record of high satisfaction among the families of its beneficiaries is the envy of the Federal Government and is a reflection of sound administration and strong congressional support, free of political influence. The Department of Veterans Affairs has a well-established and proven method that uses distance and demographics to select new cemetery sites.

While I believe that the VA process has its flaws and could use revision, it is the established process. Congress has long deferred to this process, which is essentially free from political pressure. Since 1999, Congress has authorized 12 new national cemeteries, all of which went through this process. A recent program evaluation of this policy revealed that there are some weaknesses in this policy and made several recommendations on how to better serve veterans and their families.

One such recommendation was to reduce the population threshold so that each cemetery would serve a population to as little as 120,000 veterans. The current population level is 170,000 veterans. VA is continuing to review the evaluation.

It is because of this process that Mr. STEARNS of Florida offered an amendment that was accepted for H.R. 1660, which is the predecessor of H.R. 174 from the 110th Congress. The amendment was intended to ensure that any new cemetery authorized by this bill would not displace cemetery projects in areas previously identified as priorities. This language preserves the integrity of the cemetery planning process.

I thank the original sponsors of the bill, Mr. SALAZAR and Mr. LAMBORN, for including this language in this year's bill, and I am very pleased to support it.

Having no further speakers, again, I just want to echo what Mr. WALZ said earlier, that this is one of the most important functions that the Veterans' Affairs Committee does and has done it

very, very well through the years. This is a very bipartisan bill.

I urge all of our Members to support this very, very important bill as it goes forward.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 174.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Minnesota?

There was no objection.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I, too, want to thank Mr. BOOZMAN for his eloquent words and his passion on this issue. This is truly an issue that unites every Member of this House and every member of this country, the care and the dignity that we lay our veterans to rest.

I want to thank Mr. SALAZAR and Mr. LAMBORN again for their unwavering commitment to getting this done.

I urge my colleagues to unanimously support H.R. 174.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of my bill, H.R. 174, directing the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery south of Colorado Springs, to serve the veterans and families of southern Colorado.

Mr. Speaker, Coloradans take great pride in serving our nation.

As a veteran myself, I am proud to represent a district that is home to 70,000 of Colorado's almost 427,000 veterans.

Generations of Coloradans have stood in the service of our nation with pride.

In sharing that pride, our nation must also show its gratitude when our veterans pass away.

During this difficult time, it eases a family's burden when seeing their loved one interred at a veteran's cemetery and to witness their sacrifices being remembered by the nation they served.

However, we are faced with a situation where current standards place many VA cemeteries closer to large metropolitan areas.

In my home state alone, there are 150,000 veterans in the 29 designated southern Colorado counties that are waiting for an accessible veteran's cemetery.

Such policies punish our veterans for choosing to be buried in the small towns where they chose to live and raise their families.

It is wrong to force families to travel many hours and hundreds of miles to visit the final resting place of their loved ones.

As it stands, veterans and their families living in southern Colorado have the option of either making the difficult journey north to Ft. Logan in Denver or east to Ft. Lyons in Las Animas.

With these facilities, families have found themselves forced to travel extreme distances over rough terrain in unpredictable weather.

Since 1862, more than three million burials have been made in VA national cemeteries.

National cemeteries are the testimony of a grateful nation to appropriately commemorate the Americans who have served our nation in the armed forces.

Of the 120 cemeteries the VA National Cemetery Administration manages, 58 of them are no longer accepting interments. In anticipation of this, a cemetery in southern Colorado would extend the life of Ft. Logan and Ft. Lyon.

Families would no longer have to travel to these distant locations and instead could bury their loved ones closer to home.

In doing so, space that would otherwise be used at Ft. Logan and Ft. Lyon would remain available for families closer to Denver and Las Animas.

On May 2, 2008 the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability and Memorial Affairs held a field hearing in Colorado Springs, Colorado to review the need for a cemetery in southern Colorado.

The hearing was presided over by Chairman JOHN HALL, Representative DOUG LAMBORN and myself.

Veterans Advocates, VSO's and widows with Gold Star Wives gave testimony in support of the legislation and reinforced the need for such a cemetery.

After hearing testimony and having experienced the difficult driving conditions and an abrupt snow storm, particularly over Monument Hill, then Under Secretary Tuerk committed to bringing a national veterans cemetery to the southern Colorado region.

The cemetery is supported by national VSO's, local veteran's advocates and most importantly the veterans and their families living in Colorado.

With such overwhelming support by the Colorado delegation and Congress, the VA would be acting on the intent of Congress in establishing a cemetery in southern Colorado.

I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support our rural veterans and support this bill.

Mr. WALZ. I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of our time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 174.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1615

SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING GREATER SUPPORT FOR VETERANS DAY

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 89) supporting and encouraging greater support for Veterans Day each year.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 89

Whereas veterans of service in the United States Armed Forces have served the Nation with honor and at great personal sacrifice;

Whereas the American people owe the security of the Nation to those who have defended it;

Whereas on Veterans Day each year, the Nation honors those who have defended democracy by serving in the Armed Forces;

Whereas veterans continue to provide a valuable service in their communities across the Nation and are important members of American society;

Whereas we must honor and express our sincere gratitude to all our veterans for their unwavering commitment to country, justice and democracy;

Whereas the observance of Veterans Day is an expression of faith in democracy, faith in American values, and faith that those who fight for freedom will defeat those whose cause is unjust; and

Whereas section 6103(a) of title 5, United States Code, provides that "Veteran's Day, November 11" is a legal public holiday: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) encourages Americans to demonstrate their support for veterans on Veterans Day each year by treating that day as a special day of reflection;

(2) encourages schools and teachers to educate students on the great contributions veterans have made to the country and its history, both while serving as members of the United States Armed Forces and after completing their service; and

(3) requests that the President issue a proclamation each year in connection with the observance of Veterans Day calling on the people of the United States to observe that day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ) and the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, each year on Veterans Day, Americans come together to honor our Nation's heroes, over 23 million veterans that have served our country. Again this year, our country is engaged in conflicts that require the dedication of our uniformed troops. Our Nation has a proud legacy of appreciation and commitment to the men and women who have worn the uniform in defense of this great land. We must be united in seeing that every soldier, sailor, airman and marine is welcomed back with all the care and compassion that this grateful Nation can bestow.

House Resolution 89 encourages Americans to demonstrate their support for veterans. No other group of Americans has stood stronger and braver for our democracy than our troops and veterans.

As a member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, it is my honor to serve the veterans of this Nation, and I encourage my fellow Americans to do the same. I firmly believe that Veterans Day should not be observed just once a year, but our Nation's heroes must be celebrated, honored and remembered every single day of the year.

I encourage all Americans to reach out to veterans, thank them and their families for the amazing sacrifices they make, learn more about their contributions to our country, and gain the wisdom of their personal stories.

On this 90th official Veterans Day, it is important to let these heroes know that this grateful Nation honors their service. Pause to remember that service and the sacrifices of each and every one who has worn this Nation's uniform. On Veterans Day and throughout the year, join me and every Member of this House to take the time and show your gratitude to those who have answered the call of duty.

Mr. Speaker, I know as a veteran myself, as a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and having the honor to serve there, and as a teacher of our high school students, how incredibly important it is to remember the foundations this country was founded on and those who are willing to give and, as we speak, are still willing to give the ultimate sacrifice.

Veterans Day is not a day for sales, and Veterans Day is not a day to take the day off. Veterans Day is a day to understand that all the blessings of liberty and freedom this country has emanate from each and every one of those. So I think it is incredibly important. I urge support for this piece of legislation.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 89, a resolution supporting and encouraging greater support for Veterans Day each year.

Our Nation's veterans have sacrificed so much for the freedoms that we enjoy on a daily basis. Our Nation has an obligation to ensure that those who have served, and especially those who were injured while serving, have the necessary benefits and services available to allow them to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

Today, a new generation of heroes returns home, too often draped in the Nation's flag. Their comrades in arms stand guard and honor their memories as they themselves become the living symbols of the cost of freedom. It is right that today, almost 1 week before our commemoration of Veterans Day, that we consider this resolution encouraging and supporting the observance of this important day for our Nation.

This resolution encourages Americans to demonstrate their support for veterans on Veterans Day each year by treating that day as a special day of reflection, encourages schools and teachers to educate students on the great contributions our veterans have made to our country, and requests that the President issue a proclamation each year in connection with the observance of Veterans Day.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, Mr. BACA of California, for introducing this legislation, as well as Chairman FILNER and Ranking Member BUYER for moving the bill so quickly to the floor for consideration.

I urge my colleagues to support H. Res. 89.

Mr. Speaker, having no further speakers, I just again want to say how